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ABSTRACT

This project was implemented and developed to assist low-achieving tenth grade students' essay writing skills. According to examinations administered during the first part of the 2002 school term, many tenth-grade students were not performing on their grade level in regards to the writing process. The overall goal was to have students be able to successfully write and comprehend the elements of the five-paragraph essay (English). The objective of the project was for students to successfully write and understand with 70% accuracy in the areas of prewriting, drafting, revising, and finalization of essay writing, as measured by teacher-made pre/post tests. Students were presented with a series of 18 interventions designed by the writer for increasing basic skills in composing and writing essays on various topics. Methods for improvement included instruction in the various stages of the writing process such as prewriting, drafting, revision, proofing, and publishing of five-part essays. Additionally, graphic organizers for clustering, Venn diagrams, comparison-contrast charts, revision charts, peer editing and scoring rubrics were used to reach objectives. All students either met or exceeded the intended objectives. Eight students attained growth at the 70% level. The writer recommended that the time spent on the peer editing, clustering methods, and writing portfolios be increased and that rubrics be used to assist students for their self-monitoring of essay writing. Appendixes contain the pretest and a rubric for scoring. (Contains 23 references and 1 table.) (Author/RS)

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Improving Tenth-Grade Students' Five-Paragraph Essay Writing Skills Using Various Writing Strategies, Guided Assignments, and Portfolios for Growth.

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Abstract

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Improving Tenth-Grade Students' Five-Paragraph Essay Writing Skills Using Various Writing Strategies, Guided Assignments, and Portfolios for Growth.

This project was implemented and developed to assist low-achieving tenth grade students' essay writing skills. According to examinations administered during the first part of the 2002 school term, many tenth-grade students were not performing on their grade level in regards to the Writing process. The overall goal was to have students be able to successfully write and comprehend the elements of the five-paragraph essay (English). The objective of the project was for students to successfully write and understand with 70% accuracy in the areas of prewriting, drafting, revising, and finalization of essay writing, as measured by teacher-made pre/post tests.

Students were presented with a series of 18 interventions designed by the writer for increasing basic skills in composing and writing essays on various topics. Methods for improvement included instruction in the various stages of the writing process such as prewriting, drafting, revision, proofing, and publishing of five-part essays. Additionally, graphic organizers for clustering, Venn diagrams, comparison-contrast charts, revision charts, peer editing and scoring rubrics were used to reach objectives. All students either met or exceeded the intended objectives. Eight students attained growth at the 70% level. The writer recommended that the time spent on the peer editing, clustering methods, and writing portfolios be increased and that rubrics be used to assist students for their self-monitoring of essay writing.

Background

Setting

Bethel High School, specifically, was set in the heart of Hampton, Virginia, which was considered an urban setting. The major employers of the City of Hampton were the Hampton City School District and the Newport News Shipyard. Hampton City Schools enrollment was at the time 81, 000, K-12 and 12,000 students graduated from high schools in the Hampton Roads Metro area in 1997. According to statistics (Virginia Department of Education, City of Hampton Economic Development 2002), there were over 81,000 students enrolled in K-12 educational facilities on the Virginia Peninsula with an average student to teacher ratio at 18:1. In addition, Hampton Public Schools reported that their major emphasis is on academic achievement skills, and subject matter and fostering good study habits (City of Hampton Economic Development/Education & Training 2002). According to Elena Brooks, Principal of Bethel High School, there were 966 male students and 984 female students at Bethel High. Specifically, the population of tenth-graders was 504: 255 male students and 249 female students. There were 235 ninth-grade female students, 210 ninth-grade male students; there were 546 eleventh graders, 283 that were males and 263, which were females. In the twelfth grades, the numbers were 230 female students and 230 male students. In addition, the racial population was 41% White, 55% African-American, 2% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, and 0.1% Indian. The pupil-teacher ratio was 18%, according to statistical data given by E. Brooks, (personal communication, April 5, 2002) Principal of

Bethel High School. According to daily data report sheets provided by H. Ford (personal communication, April 11, 2002) supervisor of the Bethel High School Cafeteria, there were 260 free-lunch students, 89 reduced-lunch students and 1607 paid-lunch students. According to the dailypress.com, the Standards of Learning Test results for the English (Reading/Literature/Writing portion were as followed: Percent passing in 1998 was 68.7793, 1999, 67.8652. 2002, 74.7788 and for 2001 the scores were 82.4766.

Problem Identification

Overall, 83% of students of Bethel High School were writing on their grade levels as indicated by the Standards of Learning Spring 2001 test results Barnett (N.D). However, 17% did not grasp the concept of the elements of the Writing Process. In 2001/2002, according to final report scores given by three tenth-grade English teachers at Bethel High School, including the writer, (C. Hopkins, personal communication, April 11, 2002) only 98 students received an A at the end of the school year, 121 students received a B, 125 received a C, 139 received a D and the remaining 17 students received an F (M. Calfee, tenth-grade English Teacher, Bethel High, personal communication, April 11, 2002), (K. Sutherland, tenth-grade English teacher, Bethel High, personal communication, April 12, 2002). Therefore, students, specifically, tenth-graders have not shown overwhelming improvement at writing above a C/D grade level. The STAR Vocabulary test was administered to tenth graders yearly and the following scores for the writer's tenth-grade classes were as followed: 26 students received scores of 12th grade/college; 21 received scores of 10th grade level; 23 received 8th/9th grade level; 24 students received 6th/7th grade level; and the remaining 32 students received scores of 5th grade and below.

Goal

Low - achieving tenth-grade students improved their ability to write effective five-paragraph essays that reflected tenth-grade writing skills.

Objective

Over a period of six weeks, 18 interventions were implemented to assist low-achieving students with their ability to improve essay-writing skills and the targeted group, which was 50%, improved their writing skills by 40%, but students exceeded this percentage by 70% improvement.

Review of the Literature

Fact-Finding

Hunt's (2002) study of the Writing Process seemed to be appropriate for this group because it worked well with secondary students. Hunt believed that higher education could offer students support in becoming more adept at dealing with written language as critical consumers of it as an effective, fluent, and powerful producers of writing. He tested students in grades 9-12 in California over a period of two years for writing for literacy. He proved that students responded eagerly about writing essays about literature and other disciplines when they viewed or saw a piece of literature performed.

Bergh and Rijlaarsdam's (2000) strategy seemed appropriate for this group because it seemed to work well with middle and secondary students. Bergh and Rijlaarsdam tested 36 students in ninth grade in the Netherlands over one year for changes in Cognitive Activities during the Writing Process and relationships with text quality. As a result, the researchers proved that the occurrence during the Writing Process of two cognitive activities, task-representation, and formulating activities were significantly linked, and increased student writing tremendously.

Brown's (1998) study of the impact of keeping writing portfolios on student and adult children seemed appropriate for this age group because it worked well with older

children. Brown tested twenty students from various ethnic backgrounds, who had piloted new instructional materials for portfolio development from 1997 to 1998, and proved that a marked increase in the participant's self-knowledge after portfolio development, a greater recognition of the value of learning from work and mentors, and improved communication and organization skills, and a greater appreciation of the role of reflection in recognizing learning.

Wong, Kuperis, Jamieson, Keller and Cull-Hewitt's study (1994-1996) of the guided journal writing on students' greatly improved students' understanding of themes and main characters in a complex novel and writing assignment. Out of 12 English classes chosen for this study, the researchers proved that students believed that the writing made them think more deeply about the story or assignment they were asked to write.

Lapp and Flood's (1992) study of the Writing Process as it related to implementing a writer-centered classroom worked well with this group of older students. Researchers tested students in various grade levels in California for over a period of two years. They concluded that in a writing-centered classroom teachers needed to avoid teaching the stages of the writing as a recipe that led to a finished product worthy of publication. A recipe approach to writing disregarded a great deal of important research and suggested that writing cannot be reduced to a sequence of individual steps and that writing was unique, not only to the individual, but also to the context and type.

Marchison and Alber's (1998) study on tips for teaching the Writing Process to resistant writers seemed adequate for this group because it worked well with secondary students in addition, resistant students. Researchers in Germany tested students in grades

9-12 over 1 year for resistance to the Writing Process. Researchers discovered that when students were taught to write using the Writing Process paired with the tools of technology, direct instruction, and a committed, well-trained teacher, the results were positive when teaching resistant students of writing.

A report done by the Colorado Department of Education (2002) on what 10th and 11th graders should know about reading and writing seemed relevant to this group because of grade levels. The report tested and provided sample problems students solved on the Colorado Student Writing Assessment Program tests over 1 year reading and writing comprehension. The report concluded that students increased their scores on college-entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT if given ample instruction before testing.

Sultana, Quasar, and Kay's strategy (1991) or pre and post KERA students' writing skills seemed appropriate for this group because it worked well with secondary students. Researchers tested high-school students in Kentucky over 2 years for a comparative study in the writing portfolio and writing prompts. Researchers discovered no significant differences detected at any level between the means of these two groups.

Liru's (1998) strategy of examining the effects of drafting and revising patterns on students' writing seemed appropriate for this group because it worked well with older children. Liru tested 475 students in Delaware (113 in grade 3, 117 in grade 5, and 116 in grade 10) over 1 year for drafting and revision patterns exhibited by students during testing. Liru found that out of 475 essays, 34% of the second drafts showed some evidence of improvement through revisions, but 66% showed no evidence of improvement and only 3% of the second drafts showed signs of some improvement.

Lipson and Wixson's (1997) strategy of assessment and instruction of reading and writing disability seemed appropriate for this group because it worked well with secondary students. Researchers tested 163 children in grades 8th and 9th in New York over 6 months for reading and writing disabilities. They concluded that the interactive view approach suggested that reading and writing disabilities reflected the match between learner and the conditions of the learning experience rather than simplified deficits of the learner.

Hohn's (2002) study of the effects of survey format on perceived competence in writing seemed appropriate for this group because it worked well with children of various age levels. Hohn tested students in grades 5-12 in Colorado over 2 years to find out whether or not students of various ages reported different self-perceptions of their writing. He discovered the correlation between perceived competencies, overall scores on the writing assessments were low, and that data interpretation needed to connect to student experiences.

Mott and Hare (1998) established a direct line between the rubric Writing What You Read (WWYR) and discovered an increase in student performance. The inclusion of technology, hypermedia/process writing curriculum greatly enhanced students' eagerness to respond to writing assignments. During a three-month long study in Illinois, researchers concluded that WWYR rubrics were reliable and valuable guides for assisting students in the Writing Process.

A report done by the State Department of Education (1999) in grades 3, 7, and 10 seemed appropriate for this group because it showed a direct link between writing assessment and state-mandated testing. During a two-year study, the researchers found

that it was helpful for parents, teachers, and students to have a functioning knowledge of the essay-writing portion of the state-mandated test to better prepare students for such tests. The results indicated that scores improved greatly with all three elements working toward the same goal. Similarly, in Nebraska, (2000-2001) a statewide writing assessment follow-up provided information about the Nebraska statewide Writing Assessment, the federal reporting of assessment information, and preparing local school district assessment portfolios. The results indicated that with prior preparation for state-mandated writing tests such as review of the Writing Process and the implementation of the school-based, teacher-led assessment, scores greatly improved. Students in grades 4, 8, and 11 participated in a two-day assessment with drafts generated the first day and revised on the second day before testing. Additionally, reports indicated progress toward reading, speaking, and writing standards.

A report on the Five-Paragraph Essay (2002) was informative and seemed appropriate for teaching the Writing Process to secondary students. Additionally, it provided an abundance of techniques and tips for students in the areas of organization, writing practice, and essay structure. The report stated that polished essay-writing involved strong organizational and critical thinking skills in addition to lots of writing practice. Moreover, it discussed the sequential steps required to write an effective and polished essay that explained the significance of the writer establishing his or her audience and mastering the five separate parts of the essay. The report also indicated that there was a strong link between the Introductory and Concluding portions of the essay, as well as the importance of the thesis statement, the use of transitional phrases, and the body of the five-paragraph essay.

Additionally, organization of those aspects that were satisfactory, focusing on diction, grammatical concerns, punctuation, and spelling; breaking down these aspects of what constituted good writing was easier for students to comprehend. Additionally, the report discussed the reviewing of first drafts, and the highest priorities were global concerns often Langer's study (1996) of English in middle and high school discovered the connection between the teachers' professional lives accompanied student achievement in writing and reading. This study worked well because it showed a correlation between teacher professionalism and students as learners of English. Langer tested 44 middle and high school students in four states (New Jersey, New York, Maine, and Boston) and proved that the importance of a climate that promoted student achievement, teacher professionalism, structured improvement activities, teacher caring and community, and respect for lifelong learning are interrelated.

Livingston's guide, a report, Basic Guide to Writing an Essay, (2002) seemed for teaching students about the importance of revision in the Writing Process. The researcher believed that students needed to look at a draft, starting with major issues such as the main ideas, content n referred to as "higher-order thinking" and in the early part of the drafting and revising process, it was important to look at the overall focus, organization and development of the text. The writer chose this report because the researcher examined the elements of the five-paragraph essay in relation to the revision process and the holistic organization of the essay. Additionally, it explained the necessity of essay elements to be in balance in order to create coherent and polished essays that emphasized revision being crucial to the successful outcome of student-essay writing.

Selected Solutions

The writer chose to implement Hunt's study (2001) of the Writing Process because it showed student improvement in writing essays. The oral aspect of literature was emphasized with Hunt's study and suggested that students internalized and connected more with literature when read aloud or dramatized. In addition, the writer believed that students needed more opportunities to view literature through live productions or film versions. Moreover, the writer believed that most curriculums that had been done on authentic motives for writing had suggested or assumed that in schools there were not enough opportunities for engaging in writing that genuinely mattered to students. Therefore, the writer believed that teachers needed to find creative connections to create situations in which student writing mattered—to the writer, and to someone else—and that ultimately changed and deepened the learning and comprehending of literature.

The writer chose Brown's (1980) study of the impact of keeping writing portfolios on student writing because it had been researched that portfolios enhanced student growth and self-reflection as related to the Writing Process. The study also incorporated various ethnic groups to gain a better assessment and equity of student perceptions and writing skills. A greater recognition of the value of learning from work and mentors provided students with greater communication and organizational skills, as well as a greater appreciation of the role of reflection in recognizing self and learning.

Lapp and Flood's study (1992) explored writing as cognitively demanding and complex and a multifaceted task. Traditional approaches to writing instruction had attempted to teach students the juggling act by carefully examining each item of the writing process. However, this approached required that students had to figure out the

relationships between and amongst these different groups. However, researchers focused upon deviating away from the traditional five-paragraph essay in an effort to liberate students of the writing stresses and limitations often imposed and required of the Writing Process. The write chose this method because it focused upon a writer-centered classroom and individualized the writing process. The writer's role was one of facilitator, helping students find their own unique writing processes to initiate writing assignments. Additionally, it eased student fears about the Writing Process.

The writer chose a report done by Kathy Livingston on the Guide to Writing a Basic Essay (2002) because it explained the elements of the five-paragraph essay. Included in the report were some basics of the Writing Process, which were structure, editing, revising, and evaluating the essay, as well as naming and defining the three major types of essays, which are Expository, Narrative, and Persuasive. The report also went into detail about the mechanics of the writing effective Introductory, Supporting, and Concluding paragraphs.

Marchisan and Alber's study (1998) focused upon teaching writing to resistant writers. It explored ideas about how to get resistant writers interested in writing. The researcher and writer chose this study because it offered strategies for getting resistant writers motivated, while it maintained the traditional elements of the Writing Process. Marchisan and Alber's strategy of helping students find the writer chose personal meaning in their writing because it was also a great way to motivate students in the prewriting stages of the writing process. For example, some students who displayed difficulty with writing were a rite about their favorite athletes, musicians, or television

personalities; in addition, students were encouraged to write about their favorite hobbies, computer games, and so on.

Wong, Kuperis, Jamieson, Keller, and Cull-Hewitt's study (1994-1996) investigated the effects of journal writing on students' understanding of themes and main characters in a complex novel. The writer chose this study because it emphasized the need for students to read and write more in order to gain a broader view of the Writing Process and deepen reading comprehension. In addition, it kept students focused upon writing and the importance of the written word and connected writing and reading.

The Five-Paragraph Essay (2002) provided information on the revision process that received a lot of attention in contemporary writing pedagogy. The concept of revising was considered to be at the heart of process pedagogy, as it was practiced in schools with multiple-draft requirements. The writer chose this report because it worked well with explaining the revision process to high school students. Additionally it provided a fresh look at a draft, starting with major issues such as the main idea, content, and organization of a text (global or whole-text issues).

Implementation

The teacher presented a teacher made pretest, which was in the form of writing prompts. In addition, a rubric was used to score the essay so that students evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. The rubric asked specific questions pertaining to essay writing such as content, details, style, mechanics, and grammar, and a numeric basis from 0-6 was used for scoring. Additionally, the test required that students identified the five parts of the traditional essay, as well as underlines their thesis statement and topic sentences. Fifteen students who scored the lowest on this test were selected as the target group. At the conclusion of the 18 interventions, the teacher administered the same test as a posttest to determine if students had shown growth in the Writing Process.

Week One

Lesson One

Teacher identified the five parts of the Five-Part essay to students and illustrated on the board the essential steps of the Writing Process, which were Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Proofing, and Publishing. In addition, the teacher modeled the writing process steps. Moreover, the teacher defined the terms used in the writing process, as well as the five parts of the essay. The teacher required students to record the information in their learning logs. Afterwards, the teacher quizzed students to recall the information by asking the following questions:

- What was prewriting?
- What was the drafting stage of the writing process?
- Why was revision necessary when writing an essay?
- What was the significance of proofing one's essay?
- What were some ways that students can publish their finished essays?
- Why was Peer Editing important?

Lesson Two

The teacher wrote five writing topics on the board and demonstrated the prewriting stage of the writing process. Additionally the teacher chose a topic and clustered for thematic connections using a graphic organizer. Students chose one of the five writing topics and modeled the teacher's example of clustering and prewriting in their learning logs.

Lesson Three

The teacher instructed students on how to begin planning and drafting an introductory paragraph. Using a teacher-made handout illustrating an effective introductory paragraph, the teacher gave copies to each student for in-class and homework review. The handout highlighted the opening sentence for the introductory paragraph, often known as the "attention grabber" or "opening statement." The teacher further explained that a good opener was essential in getting a reader interested in reading what the writer had to say. Moreover, the introductory paragraph established the writer's purpose or subject and contained the thesis statement, better known as the controlling idea that kept the essay on topic. Students practiced writing an effective and interesting attention grabber for their introductory

paragraphs. The teacher encouraged students to read their openers and conveyed to them that if their opening sentences were dull, then they would probably be dull to the reader.

Week Two

Lesson Four

Students continued working on the introductory paragraph. The teacher instructed students to brainstorm or free-write for more ideas that pertained to their topics so that they were able to write four or five supporting sentences. Additionally, the teacher modeled for students how to use the active voice instead of the passive voice when writing. Students referred to their handouts to see logical progression in the Introductory paragraph. The teacher defined a thesis statement and lectured to students the importance of it. Furthermore, the thesis statement could be branched into three related attributes, making their essays easier to write.

Lesson Five

The teacher instructed students to write a thesis statement and that is usually was the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. Students worked on composing thesis statements and then they were asked to rewrite their entire introductory paragraphs using the drafts they had been working on in class. Students then exchanged papers with peers, proofed, and discussed each other's introductory paragraphs.

Lesson Six

The teacher demonstrated to students using an overhead projector how to write the body of their essays. The first branch of their thesis statement was the focus of their second paragraph. Additionally, the teacher instructed students on how to write

a topic sentence and modeled the topic sentence on the board, complete with supporting details.

Week Three

Lesson Seven

Students worked on their third paragraph of their essays, using notes and handouts given by the teacher to assist them in their rough drafts. The teacher reinforced to students that the same process and rules applied when writing the third and fourth paragraphs. The teacher, also, instructed that the second and third branches of the thesis statement would be the basis for the third and fourth paragraphs, known as the Body of the essay. Teacher explained to students that if they followed these sequential steps they would acquire the elements of writing effective five-part essays that were often given on various exams, as well as required in English classes.

Lesson Eight

Teacher illustrated to students how to write supporting details necessary to support topic sentences in essays. Additionally, the teacher reminded students not to change the order, for the reader was expecting them to follow a road map that was presented in their first paragraphs. Teacher modeled the process by demonstrating how to write supporting details then required students to model the illustration.

Lesson Nine

Teacher demonstrated on the blackboard what effective paragraphs that constituted the body of the essay:

- A topic sentence

- Discussion, support, or elaboration of the point made in the topic sentence
- Concrete examples, statistics, or facts.
- A concluding sentence, which restated the main point of the paragraph.

Students wrote the information in their learning logs for later review. Then the teacher checked students' drafts of body paragraphs for accuracy. Students used the strategies that they learned thus far and finished working on drafts of the body of the five-paragraph essay.

Week Four

Lesson Ten

Teacher discussed the elements of the concluding sentence, which restated the main points presented in the paragraphs. Furthermore, the teacher modeled for students that it was easy to stray away from an intended topic in a paragraph and that a concluding statement restated the topic or point of the paragraph keeping the reader focused on their argument or discussion. Teacher modeled for students how to restate the main points of their paragraphs so that their concluding sentences would be coherent, cohesive, and easy for the reader to follow. Students wrote their concluding sentences for the body of their essay paragraphs.

Lesson Eleven

The teacher stated that a well-written essay was dependent upon many elements and writing an effective conclusion was essential because it was one of the first things a reader remembered after having read a piece of writing. A discussion that a writer understood and took advantage of the power of an

effective conclusion was the central topic of class session. The students viewed a film on the writing process to reinforce student comprehension of writing. Students were also given portfolios in which to keep their drafts and finished essays for later review. Students were then instructed in using journals to record their daily progress with writing effectively. Moreover, the teacher continued her lecture on the importance of effective conclusions, stating that they were the last chance the writer had to convince the reader of his argument. The teacher illustrated this by demonstrating several suggestions for concluding essays:

- Use a summary statement rather than phrases like the following: In summary, "To conclude…" To summarize…" or "In closing…"

  Teacher stated that these closing phrases were too obvious and vague; instead, it was suggested that students use a transitional phrase, which summarized a point in their essays instead. A sample summary statement was as followed: "As we have seen, poverty is a known contributor to crime; therefore, it should not be discounted when considering ways to prevent crime."

- Use a quotation. For example, use "As a man thinks, so is he." When your paper has just explained how negative thinking had created problems for someone.

Lesson Twelve

The teacher modeled how to use effective transitions words and phrases. Students used their textbooks to enhance their understanding of how transitions work in essays and transition paragraphs so that they would flow. Some of the transitions that were discussed were sequence, time, comparison, contrast,

examples, cause and effect, place and concession. Students practiced including transitions throughout their essays and made them flow nicely into the next train of thought.

Week Five

Lesson Thirteen

After students finished rewriting their essays, the teacher had students compare and contrast their drafts and final papers. Students were made to peer edit each other's essays for grammatical errors, logical sequence, and thesis statements. Afterwards, students put their initial drafts in their portfolios and journaled what they had learned thus far about the writing process. For homework, students used drafts, peer editing sheets, handouts, and notes to write a final essay.

Lesson Fourteen

Students turned in their finished essays for feedback and a grade. Later in the period, the teacher assigned students to write about their essay-writing experience in their learning logs. Students were asked to review what they had learned about the writing process that they did not know before. Then the teacher allowed students to free-write about any topic that they found liberating and stress free. The free writing lasted about twenty minutes.

Lesson Fifteen

To test what students had actually learned and accomplished during their writing workshop, the teacher gave students a poem they had read in class entitled, "Courage" by Anne Sexton and told them to write a five-paragraph essay

on the poem using all the essentials of the five-part essay discussed and practiced during The writing workshop. This was an in-class writing assignment and students were allowed to use any resource that they thought would be beneficial to them in completion of the assignment. Students were reminded of the essentials of paragraph elements before composing their essays. Students were also given writing prompts to assist them in disseminating the poet's message.

Week Six

Lesson Sixteen

The teacher placed ten writing topics on the board from which students could choose to write on. Students chose a topic and wrote a five-paragraph essay that went through the entire writing process. The topics dealt with teenage-related topics such as dating, sports, video games, music, and freedom. The final essay was accompanied by a draft, peer-editing review sheet, some evidence of prewriting. This in-class writing assignment was a timed writing and they utilized the full ninety-minute period.

Lesson Seventeen

The teacher instructed certain students to spend time in the Writing Center located in the back of the classroom. The Writing Center provided students who were exhibiting trouble with the Writing Process, grammar, and writing exercise worksheets. After students had worked on an area of writing that the teacher considered weak, students placed their assignments in student portfolios that were reviewed by teacher and used to review student growth in writing. A proficient

student of the Writing Process was assigned to assist students who were having trouble with aspects of the Writing Process.

Lesson 18

The teacher demonstrated the reader-response approach to literature that had gained much support from the English Department at Bethel High School local and school districts. It allowed students to respond to literary works without input from the teacher. The teacher reported to students they should experience a literary work by immersing themselves into its story world and by bringing to bear on it their prior experiences, attitudes, and values. Furthermore, the teacher explained that reading with an experiential focus and not an information-extracting focus produced an aesthetic experience for the reader. The teacher chose a short story entitled, "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker for students to read. Then students wrote down their first impressions to the story and then annotated for certain literary devices. Afterwards, students watched a short film version of the story, discussed the elements of the short story, and drafted a reader-response paper that incorporated their personal responses and conformed to the elements of the five-paragraph essay.

- The teacher gave students the posttest that was given at the beginning of the Implementation Plan.

Results

The project was concerned with improving low-achieving tenth-grade English students' with essay writing skills to a degree that would enable them to successfully pass state-mandated writing tests and write essays that reflected tenth-grade writing skills. Initially, students showed a general dislike and disinterest in the importance of writing well and this was reflected in their back-to-school essays. For the most part, writing instruction in this grade was taught by using "The Hamburger" method, a Hampton City Schools approach to teaching the essentials of the five-paragraph essay, textbooks, and lectures.

The project was implemented and developed to assist low-achieving students in writing effectively and competently. According to examinations administered during the first part of the 2002 school term, many tenth-graders were not performing on their grade level in regards to the Writing Process. The overall goal was to have students be able to successfully write and comprehend the elements of the five-paragraph essay (English). The objective of the project was for students to successfully write and understand with at least 70% accuracy the areas of prewriting, drafting, revising, and finalizing essay writing, as measured by teacher-made pre/post test. The basic strategies used in this project included journal entries, free writing, clustering, strategies that unlocked writer's block, graphic organizers, elements of writing handouts, hands-on activities, peer editing, practice worksheets for in-class and homework, portfolios, and The Writing Center for further instruction.

Before implementation, students were administered a pretest that measured what they had already acquired and understood about the five-paragraph essay and the sequential steps of the writing process. The pretest was entitled "Writing a Five-Paragraph Essay" (Appendix A, p.33) and consisted of two essay topics that required students to choose a topic, using all the elements of the traditional writing process such as prewriting, drafting, and finalization of a polished essay. Students were to show evidence of the writing process by attaching their drafts and prewrites to the final essay. While writing the essay, students were asked to identify their thesis statements, topic and concluding sentences, the Introduction, Body and Conclusion portions of the essay by identifying these elements in the margins of their essays using colored pencils. An essay - scoring rubric created by the writer entitled "Rubric for Scoring Pretest/Posttest Five-Paragraph Essay Writing" was used to score the pretest/posttest essays. The rubric (Appendix B p.34-35) measured writing skills from numerals 0-6 (6 being the highest) and measured students' abilities to focus on single ideas, supporting details, defending a position or argument, restating a thesis statement, logical and sequential order of the body of the essay, and summarizing key points made in the essay. In addition, the rubric was used to score a student's understanding of the mechanics of writing. Scores for essays were tallied and recorded to be later measured with scores taken from the posttest, which was administered after implementation. The pretest/posttest scores were as followed:

Student A/pretest score:60	Student A/posttest:72
Student B/pretest score:36	Student B./posttest:69
Student C/pretest score:48	Student C/posttest:53

Student D/Pretest score:60	Student D/posttest:72
Student E/pretest score60	Student E/posttest65
Student F/pretest score:45	Student F/posttest:56
Student G/pretest score:69	Student G/posttest:72
Student H/pretest scored:48	Student H/posttest:59
Student I/pretest score:57	Student I/posttest:63
Student J/pretest score:72	Student J posttest:72
Student K/pretest score:57	Student K/posttest:63
Student L/pretest score:48	Student L/posttest:51
Student M/pretest score:60	Student M posttest:63
Student N/pretest score:57	Student N/posttest:60
Student O/pretest score:72	Student O/posttest:72

The objective specified that tenth grade students demonstrated the use of a writing strategy with at least 70% accuracy as measured by a teacher-made pre/posttest (Appendix A, p.33). Of the 15 students who participated in the project, 5 met this objective with posttest scores used by a scoring rubric with 72% percent being the maximum points. These scores were a dramatic change over the pretest scores. Improvements ranged from 36 to 72 percent. Students who had scored the maximum amount of points, initially, given during the pretest maintained their scores; however, there was significant increase in scores for the entire testing population. Every subject showed significant growth after the implementation project.

Reflection

The project was very successful and enjoyable for students and teacher. The objectives were attained and all students showed marked improvements in the area of written expression and the elements of the five-paragraph essay.

Students' attainment of the intended outcomes was achieved and significant growth in the Writing Process was shown after post testing. The writer's planned solution strategies were instrumental in assisting students in comprehending the elements of the Writing Process and were used to enhance class lecture, class demonstrations, and class assignments. Proposition 1 stated that teachers were committed to students and their learning and this project proved that if teachers took the time to devise strategies that assisted students who were not meeting curriculum mandates, then all students would perform at grade level. In addition, Proposition 3 stated that teachers were responsible for managing and monitoring student learning. It was evident that teachers who took the time to devise strategies and methods for enhanced learning could make the most effective use of time and engage students in the learning process. Additionally, teachers should be committed to student learning by reflecting upon the learning process through learning communities, thinking systematically about their teaching methods, and learning from prior experiences, thus focusing upon the significance of the Core Propositions and utilizing them where guidance and systematic thinking was needed in lesson planning and classroom activities and instruction.

The writer noticed that major growth was shown in student writing through the development of the Action Research Project; it enhanced student understanding of the sequential process of writing and set the stage for student achievement and perfection in the area of writing. The writer did not believe that anything skewed the results of the testing, but that a well-planned project was the reason for marked improvement. The writer went to great lengths during implementation to explain, demonstrate, and model the essentials of good writing, thus allowing students to comprehend a systematic process of the Writing Process. The posttest indicated that teacher efforts and strategies were the reasons for increased scores on posttest. Additionally, the writer's implementation plans were well thought out and geared for student success; there were no major obstacles that stood in the way of implementation plans.

The writer chose writing topics that were of interest to secondary students and engaged them in the topic and elements of the Writing Process. The writer did not see where the project could be improved; however, possibly, the writer should have included more writing topics than the intended two choices, allowing students more options with interesting and real-world topics that would have made it easier for personal connections and experiences. The writer was made aware of the significance of testing students prior to teacher expectation in what the writer thought should have been learned in prior grades. Testing students revealed a plethora of inconsistencies in student writing that was not focused on or taught in prior grades.

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Appendix A

Pre/Posttest/Writing a Five-Paragraph Essay

Directions: Choose one of the two essay topics and write a five-paragraph essay. Make sure that you include a thesis statement, topic sentences, and supporting details. After you have finished writing your essay, please underline your thesis statement and topic sentences using the colored pencils provided. Additionally, identify each paragraph of the essay by writing its title in the margin of the paragraph.

Essay Topics:

1. Images and beauty-both male and female- are promoted in magazines, in movies, on billboards and on television. Explain the extent to which you think theses images can be beneficial or harmful.
2. Many adults become upset when young people break with the traditions of the past. Do you think these adults are justified in reacting this way? Why or why not? Support your position with evidence from your own experience or the experience of people you know.

Appendix B

Rubric for Scoring Pretest/Posttest

- Essay has fully answered all parts of the question. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- Essay focuses around a single idea, and supports the idea through examples. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The writer clearly takes a position and develops an authoritative argument. The argument is supported by convincing reasons and well-chosen examples. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The essay has restated the question in the form of a thesis. Thus, the essay frames around the demands of the assignment. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The body of the essay has a clear and logical progression that restates the key points made in the thesis. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- Summarizing the key points made in the essay, the conclusion brings proper closure to the essay. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- Given the essay is under time constraint and that it was done in class, the essay still has a fairly high level of polish typical to other students' essays that were written under similar conditions. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The writer has not problems with punctuation, commas, semi-colons, colons. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The writer has control of sentence structure and does not have difficulties with comma splices, run-on sentences, or sentence fragments. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
- The writer uses good sentence variety. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

- The writer does not use wordy sentences and has good word choice typical of academic essays. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

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